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SUBJECT: RWANDA PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS UPDATE

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Classified By: CDA Cheryl Sim for Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

Summary.

11. (C) Preparations have begun in earnest for the September elections for the Chamber of Deputies. Late July, the EU elections monitoring advance team arrived in Kigali to begin preparations for its long-term and short-term observer teams.

The Government of Rwanda (GOR) presented a code of conduct for journalists to follow during the elections. Three local teams of local observers will also monitor the September 15-18 parliamentary elections; some of the leadership of the Civil Society Platform monitoring leadership appears less than independent. Western missions are meeting biweekly to discuss election preparations. Although the ruling Rwanda Patriotic Front is widely expected to win easily, the willingness of the GOR to allow other political parties to campaign freely and the National Electoral Commission (NEC) to function independently will be tested -- a test Rwanda failed in 2003. End summary.

GOR Briefs on Elections - Everything Ready to Go

12. (U) On July 10, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented a briefing to the diplomatic community on the September 15-18 Chamber of Deputy elections (the Senate is not up for election), with NEC President Chrysologue Karangwa and acting Executive Secretary Charles Munyaneza presiding. The NEC personnel made the following points:

- The elections would take place in phases on September 15 (53 directly elected seats), 16 (24 indirectly-elected women's seats), 17 (2 indirectly-elected youth seats) and 18 (one indirectly-elected disabled person's seat).
- With an elections budget of USD 12.2 million, the GOR will meet approximately 72 percent, with the donors' basket of funds supplying the rest.
- Of an estimated 9.2 million population, 4.7 million have registered to vote.
- 62,000 NEC electoral agents will be trained, to work at 15,000 polling stations divided among 2,150 polling centers (generally primary and secondary school yards, with six or seven polling stations per schoolyard polling center).
- Invitations had been sent to various international and local organizations to monitor the elections.
- Distribution of new voter ID card would begin soon (most Kigali residents received their cards at their umuganda community service meetings on Saturday, July 25).
- extensive voter and civic education programs would start

in the near future.

Local Monitoring Funded -- Some Disarray Among Donors

13. (C) Funding for three local monitoring efforts also was finalized in July, the bulk of the support funds going to the Civil Society Platform effort, with some funding also accorded to the Great Lakes Human Rights League (LDGL) and LIPRODHOR, the latter two the strongest and most independent human rights organizations in Rwanda. Funding missions included the EU, the Dutch, the Belgians and Canadians (the US mission is funding political party training). There has been some disagreement within the donor community, with DFID and UNDP arguing for a single local monitoring effort, while other missions (including this one) noted that the Civil Society Platform has long been considered too close to the government and perhaps incapable of a truly independent government and perhaps incapable of a truly independent effort. (Note: Post subsequently heard from several well-informed local sources that several of the senior officials chosen by the Civil Society Platform to lead the monitoring effort are Rwanda Patriotic Front operatives whose independence is questionable. End note). The Civil Society Platform will field 50 long-term observers, and 500 short-term observers, with a donor-supplied technical expert to assist them. The LDGL mission will try to field 60 long-term and 100 short-term observers. The LIPRODHOR effort is still taking shape. Discussions are occurring among the three on coordination of observation efforts in the field, as well as with the EU Mission mentioned below.

EU Mission Arrives

14. (C) The EU elections observation mission "core team" arrived July 19, and held its first press conference July 29. A 20-person long-term team fanned out around the country August 2 to begin observing preparations for the elections (in advance of the formal August 25-September 14 campaign period). A few days before the election, 50 short-term EU monitors will also arrive. In a meeting with political officers on August 1, Deputy Chief Observer Claudia Vollmer said the team had met with the Prime Minister, the NEC, the Supreme Court, political parties, and civil society. The EU team would liaise with the local monitoring groups, and meet with diplomatic missions regularly, she said. Western missions have established a bi-weekly "elections" meeting to share information and discuss issues; the EU monitoring team will now join this regular meeting. Vollner also alluded briefly to a "hold-up" with visas for several of its observers. The GOR had some time ago reserved the right to "vet" prospective observers, and the EU had decided to seek to diminish any problems on this score by any avoiding "known" personalities with whom the GOR might have a problem (reftel). Local press reports later identified the observers as one French and two Spanish citizens.

Electoral Code Change?

15. (C) While amendments to the gacaca law in 2007 allowed those convicted of category three genocide offenses (those found guilty of property crimes) to vote, the current electoral code still forbids the voter registration of anyone convicted or accused of any gacaca offense, including property crimes. Work on a new electoral code has been slow, and harmonization of the two laws before the September election appears unlikely. However, a last-minute change is supposedly in the works to allow these "category three" persons to vote. If this occurs, the change would enfranchise several hundred thousand (Hutu) voters. The formal voter registration process is over, but on the district level government functionaries may have already begun making arrangements to accommodate these voters.

Journalists' Code of Conduct Approved

¶6. (C) Journalists "approved" a Code of Conduct at a meeting hosted by the High Council of the Press on July 25. A BBC reporter who attended told us that the assembled journalists "had no power of veto" and they were simply brought together to approve the text as presented to them. None of the "independent" journalists banned from government events were invited to this session. The Code has a number of sections which proclaim the rights of journalists to gather news and defend free speech, but also requires them to "abstain" from publishing any information that encourages division or discrimination (these concepts undefined). They are also required to "rectify" any information they publish that may be "detrimental" to the dignity or reputation of a candidate or party -- hardly a prescription for vigorous election coverage.

Comment

¶7. (C) As in 2003, most political parties (there are nine in total) may join the ruling RPF in a parliamentary election coalition, leaving only two parties to actually contest seats, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Liberal Party (PL). Given its overwhelming superiority in resources and patronage, we expect the RPF to maintain its hold on the lower chamber. Nevertheless, as noted in earlier reporting (reftel), this election could provide a clear test of multiparty democracy in Rwanda and the willingness of the GOR to allow for the free-functioning of political parties and the NEC -- a test Rwanda largely failed in 2003. End comment.

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